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The Sands of Dyarlgaroo

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for Trevor Jamieson and Noel Nannup

1. CONCEPTION
We don’t like to ask, but I’d guess it was in the house bought for the purpose. Bateman Road, just up from Bateman’s Farm—a colonising place. A bike-ride from the paperbarks, the thin white riverbeach, the grey jetties, seagulls cormorants pelicans. Sharks were seen that far up. Sharks in the Canning, as I first heard it named—in the womb, listening. Speedboats would come and introduce me to irony, the violence of the outdoors, waves wearing away at the river’s walls. The city starting to close in around, the plentiful made sparse—river prawns netted at night, lights singing tanned waters, then gone. There were masses of blue manna crabs and mulloway and the river thronged with fertility. I was conceived with limestone foundations between flesh and black sand. Edging to grey, white by the river’s edge lit up by the close moon. When the seed bit the egg and I cried out. The river’s business. It’s the river we ask.

2. BIRTH
I was born in the South Perth Hospital not far from where Dyarlgaroo and Derbal Yarrigan diverge. I was born where the rivers branch. I was taken home to the banks of the “tributary.” The water flowed down from the hills, down from forests and farmlands. I was taken up to the watershed before I could talk or walk—early, it was my in-between place. As soon as I was old enough, I was carried up to the wheat. Up through jarrah into wandoo.
I went up from water and sand to stone and clay,
up from pelicans and bream to parrots and echidnas.
But I was born at the fork of those rivers, where black sand
meets white sand, where blind snakes and sandgropers
burrow their way and water rats range across meeting-places
and bloodworms work the mud, the summer sun glinting.

3. UMBILICAL CORD
I imagine my cord was stolen not far
from where the “Canning” and “Swan” rivers diverge, branch.
Taken to the incinerator. My first cremation, my ash,
my mother’s ash, floating high into the atmosphere
then drifting down on riverfoam, on lawns
of half-dead buffalo grass, on Bristile clay roofing tiles,
on black sand, on yellow sand, on the white sand
of riverbeaches edged by paperbarks with blisters
ready to burst with watery sap, with goodness.

4. FIRST STEPS
I lifted and stepped quickly before falling
a few blocks from Dyarlaroo, a measure of houses
where tracks had waved through banksias and marris,
a short walk from where the river bends to continue up to the hills,
a moment from where a spur leads off to a cul-de-sac,
a semi-dead-end, where a creek feeds Dyarlaroo through reeds.
The snakes were there. That’s where they moor boats
away from the weather and build houses to the water.
Bamboo. Bateman’s Farm. The history it enforces.
Up on my feet, I walked the Axminster carpet,
then out onto lawn, then into the black sand
which covered my steps. I observed
the ant lion, and later the lacewing,
plentiful about the river—down through banksias,
marris, onto the white sand, into the salty water,
onto the mud flats, the fresh creek water running over,
mingling, diluting. The reeds hid clutches of duck eggs.
The sand hid me. I planned where I'd go. Where the sea water joined the hill's water, the creek water. Where salt and fresh waters meet. Where salt water would meet salt water when I was older. And I was sad for all that my birthing hid.